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ABSTRACT

Functions of guidance groups, the guidance counselor, the Advocacy Program, and the Guidance Committee of the High School in the Community (HSC), New Haven, Connecticut, are described. HSC, designed to provide a choice of learning environments within the public school system, serves students dissatisfied with their previous school experience. Guidance groups consist of a staff member who doubles as a guidance teacher and approximately 20 students. Guidance teachers keep track of students' attendance and academic records, advise students regarding personal or school related problems, act as advocates and as liaison between the guidance counselor and the student, and meet with parents. The guidance counselor works individually with students planning to graduate, with students who need more counseling than the guidance teacher can give, and with the student membership coordinator. The Advocacy Program is designed to deal with behavior problems. Procedures include first and second offense meetings with the guidance teacher, counselor, member of the administrative unit, parents, and a student advocate to assist the student in preparing his/her case. Recommendations deriving from the second offense hearing entail either assigning the student a work project, involving outside professional help for the student, or referring the student for placement in another educational program. The Guidance Committee consists of four members including one student and one parent and acts as a forum for all guidance-related ideas and problems. (KC)

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GUIDANCE PACKET

By Geoffrey Smith

SO 011 954

GUIDANCE

Fundamental to the program at the High School in the Community is the idea that both teachers and students prefer to be treated as people and individuals rather than as stereotyped role objects. Consequently, teachers are often called upon to perform non-teaching functions. We realize that adolescents want and need guidance, but that this need can vary greatly from individual to individual, and even in one individual from time to time. We feel that it is the responsibility of the school to help students through their years at HSC, to help them make realistic choices for their future, and to help them deal with personal problems when they invite such help.

We have integrated these notions into the basic structure of the school and give guidance a major portion of our time and energy. Every teacher has some guidance responsibility through either a Guidance Group or a Family Group. In addition, a full-time Guidance Counselor and three other staff members share some specific areas of responsibility within the overall guidance program. The Advocacy Program, which is our method of dealing with disruptive behavior, is also linked with the guidance system. A Guidance Committee meets regularly to discuss all guidance related issues.

Since all staff members are involved in guidance, we are easily able to call upon each other for support and assistance. The students receive the advantages and benefits of this united effort.

Guidance Groups

Each staff member doubles as a guidance teacher of approximately twenty students, referred to as a Guidance Group. The guidance teacher keeps track of the students' records and advises them when they set up their class schedules

each quarter. He/she also maintains an overview of each student's academic progress as well as daily attendance information. The guidance teacher is involved in any discussion with or about the student that might pertain to discipline or academic problems.

The most important task of a guidance teacher's many responsibilities is being someone the student can come to with problems, whether they are personal or related to the school. Guidance teachers try to talk frequently with students about how they feel about school and about their classes. Initially students and guidance teachers are randomly assigned to each other, but if a student prefers to have another staff member as guidance teacher, he/she can change at any time.

Students sometimes consider their guidance teacher to be their advocate. If a student is having trouble with a subject teacher, has tried to work out the problem without success, and feels that he/she is being treated unfairly, then the student might ask the guidance teacher to help by talking with the subject teacher. Conversely, if a subject teacher feels frustrated with a student's lack of progress or co-operation, he/she may ask the guidance teacher to talk it over with the student.

The guidance teacher also acts as a liaison between the Guidance Counselor and the student. Guidance teachers with seniors are in regular contact with the Counselor to keep informed about and to be able to communicate to their seniors everything they need to know to prepare for jobs, vocational school, or college.

The guidance teacher receives a copy of the evaluation written about the student's performance and achievement in each class. The guidance teacher is expected to discuss these evaluations with the student and, when appropriate, with the student's parents.

HSC was founded on and continues to depend on parental support and involvement. The parents' primary link with the school is through their

son's or daughter's guidance teacher. Within the first month of school the guidance teacher contacts the parents of every student in his/her guidance group, either over the phone or by making a home visit. During the second week of classes the school has a Parents Night, at which the guidance teacher can meet with the parents and discuss the school, the classes, or some aspect of the student's participation in the school. Other Parents Nights are held after the end of the first, second, and third quarters.

Family Groups

Some guidance teachers have chosen to meet every day with their Guidance Group as a class, called Family Group. The class provides each member an opportunity to discuss school issues or individual concerns on a regular and structured basis. The Family Group is designed to encourage students and staff to help each other resolve personal and interpersonal problems. The emphasis is on positive growth in an atmosphere of care and trust. Students can earn elective credit for this class in the same way as in an academic class.

Family Group teachers continue to have all of the responsibilities for the job of guidance teacher for their group of students. In addition, they meet with each other weekly for mutual support and planning.

Guidance Counselor

The Guidance Counselor is primarily responsible for facilitating all aspects of the guidance system.

She is available for counseling students, parents, and teachers on the opportunities in college admissions and vocational planning. She must supervise student records, arrange to give tests, arrange conferences with parents, and maintain contact with college admissions offices. She is also a liaison with other high schools in the area.

Crucial to her functioning is the opportunity to work individually and closely with those students planning to graduate. She also disseminates information to those teachers working with seniors, and she keeps them up to date on all post-high school options. For some students, particularly those not going to college but making vocational career choices, the Guidance Counselor will work with the Career Orientation Program Co-ordinator. The COP Co-ordinator is responsible for the vocational and work experience component of HSC and often has guidance responsibilities for students participating in the program.

The Guidance Counselor also works closely with any student who seems to need more support and/or counseling than the guidance teacher can provide. In some cases this might mean referral to other agencies; in some it means working out an individualized program with the student that is outside of the classroom for some period of time. An Outreach Worker is also available to help deal informally with students who are not otherwise functioning in the school.

In administrative areas of responsibility the Guidance Counselor works with the Student Membership Co-ordinator. This person oversees the paperwork of registration and withdrawel of students, and completes the attendance reports to the central office. He maintains an up-to-date student list and keeps track of the membership in each Guidance Group. He is also responsible for the recruitment and orientation of new students.

Advocacy Program

The right of members of the entire High School in the Community includes the right to a satisfactory and responsible educational environment. Any behavior by any member of HSC which antagonizes the community in general or individuals in particular is not tolerated. Examples of disruptive behavior are (1) the open possession or use of drugs or alcohol, (2) vandalism, (3) theft,

(4) harrassment, (5) violence, and (6) gambling. The school has the responsibility to its members and the community to provide a policy for dealing with serious problems. Clearly the administrative head of the school has the right and the responsibility to take any appropriate immediate action to deal with a severe problem. However, in most cases, we feel it is much more important to follow a procedure which involves students and teachers in a positive and productive way. The program we use works as follows:

On the first offense, a meeting is held which includes the student, the witness to the offense (usually a teacher), and the student's guidance teacher to determine (1) whether an offense actually occurred, and (2) whether to inform parents, the Guidance Counselor, and/or the general staff of the situation. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss what happened and try to resolve the problem. Any one of the participants may request the presence of a member of the administrative unit at this meeting. It is the responsibility of the witness to notify the guidance teacher; it is the responsibility of the guidance teacher to arrange the meeting.

On the second or any subsequent offence, a meeting is held including the student, the witness, the guidance teacher, the Guidance Counselor, a member of the administrative unit, the parents of the student, and an advocate for the student. The student may also request the presence of a member of the student body of his/her own choosing.

The advocate for the student is an adult chosen by the student from the staff or the community. If the student cannot or will not find an advocate on his/her own, it is then the responsibility of the staff to choose an advocate for the student. The advocate is not considered a lawyer who argues the student's case, but a supporter who will assist the student to present his/her own case. The idea of the advocate is to help the student realize that he/she is not being railroaded or treated unfairly by people out to get him/her. Obviously

the advocate should be a person who has good relations with the student. It is quite possible that some roles may overlap here - the witness may also be the guidance teacher, the guidance teacher may also be the advocate, and so forth.

The purpose of this meeting, after determining that the offense did actually occur, is to make one of three possible recommendations: (1) assign a general work project to the student, (2) involve outside professional help with the student, or (3) refer the student to the appropriate school system administrators for placement in another educational program.

In the case of a serious or ongoing problem which cannot be resolved in school, the Policy Council may be asked to become involved in the decion making process. The Policy Council, which is the governing body of the school, is made up of 4 staff members, 4 parents, and 8 students. It has the final say in any matters concerning the Advocacy Program. Naturally, the student's parents will be called early in the process in order to muster all possible ways of solving the problem.

No record of these actions is kept in the student's permanent file. It is suggested that the guidance teacher keep a written record with a copy for the student.

Guidance Committee

The Guidance Committee acts as a forum for all guidance related ideas and problems. Composed of interested staff members (usually four, including the Guidance Counselor), one parent and one student, the committee meets every week. The group is charged with maintaining the excellence of our guidance program, suggesting improvements, and facilitating change when needed.